



Community Health Improvement Process

**2014-2015 Community Health Needs Assessment
Community Conversation with Youth
Suburban Hospital Medical Explorers Youth Program
May 21, 2015**

Introduction

Healthy Montgomery hosted a community conversation on Health and Well-Being in partnership with the Suburban Hospital Medical Explorers Youth Program on Thursday, May 21, 2015. The conversation took place from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, MD. There were 28 participants. All high school students in Montgomery County were invited to participate and did not have to be members of the Medical Explorers Youth Program. The conversation was facilitated by Anne Wiseman.

The community conversation included a discussion of what is meant by health and well-being at the individual and community levels, elements of a healthy community, community assets and challenges in Montgomery County, and practical steps to improve the health and well-being of the community. Participants engaged in both large and small group discussion, and were also offered the opportunity to contribute comments and feedback regarding the meeting in writing.

Establishing Ground Rules

The young people were asked to establish some ground rules for our discussion. The group members were also informed about the “Parking Lot” flip chart where topics and concerns not directly related to the discussion could be placed. The ground rules the group came up with were as follows:

- Stay cool
- [Be] respectful—don’t hate
- Enjoy yourself
- One person talk at a time
- Respect Elders
- [This is a] Safe Space—confidentiality [is implied]
- Agree to disagree
- Step up, step back (i.e. allow others to speak, and be encouraged to speak up)
- [Put] cell phones away

This group also participated in an Icebreaker activity where they were asked to find Someone Who had various characteristics. For example, they were asked to find Someone Who was not born in the DMV, is a vegan, does yoga or meditation, plans an instrument, and/or has a pet. The activity lasted approximately 7-10 minutes.



Community Health Improvement Process

Defining Health and Well-Being

Participants were asked to arrive at a common understanding of the concepts of health and well-being. The larger group engaged in a brainstorming session on both questions for approximately 25 minutes. Following are the responses to the questions “What does health mean to you?” and “What does a healthy community look like?” Below are the responses.

What does health mean to you?

- Lifestyle—what you eat, do
- Physical, mental state of well-being
- A clean life-no drugs, gangs
- Emotional health
- Social health—who you hang out with, who you can trust, followers (i.e. Twitter)
- Smiling (a physical sign)
- Diet/nutrition—fueling it with good things
- Be comfortable with yourself—like and know who you are—resiliency
- Positive mindset

What about the community/environment (externally)?

- Clean air
- [How] teachers [treat you]
- Being aware of what you use and how you use things in your environment
- How you spend your time (i.e. relax, slow down)
- The way we interact with others
- Good relationship with parents and siblings, extended family, the whole family

Assets that Support Health and Well-Being

The participants were asked to work in groups for the next part of the discussion. In groups of eight to 10 people they were to brainstorm on identifying their community assets and challenges. The groups were asked “What is going well in your community?” As the group began to answer, many of the responses seemed very broad. The facilitator then rephrased the question to “What is going well in your community—how do you know it is a healthy community?”

(Group One)

- The way we interact with others
- Good relationship with parents and siblings, extended family, the whole family
- Be happy [a sense of happiness]
- No drugs



Community Health Improvement Process

- [There is] support not to fall to [negative] peer pressure
- Jobs/money
- [There are plenty of] community activities/social events (music, concerts)
- Sports teams [at school and within the community]
- Food [healthy choices are available at the] Farmer's Market and Whole Foods
- School programs [are strong]
- Boy/girl scouts
- Medical Explorers

(Group Two)

- Graduations
- Extensions on projects
- Good grades
- Relationships with siblings
- No parallel parking on driving test
- Metro system/ride on bus/capital bike share [various public transportation options available]
- Community activities (sports, festivals)
- Pools are open
- School ending—more free time
- Safe neighborhoods
- Community amber alerts
- Clubs [plenty of school and sports clubs] such as Sneakers, a female empowerment club and Pearls, a club for girls who have kids and/or who are expecting
- [Career Academies] Medical careers/CNA program at Kennedy High School

(Group Three)

- School—grades
- Sports
- Graduating
- Driving
- Family
- Anti-bullying [campaigns]
- No drinking and driving [campaigns]
- Neighborhood is clean
- No crime
- Transportation
- In-school policing

(Group Four)

- Exercise/sports
- Food plate (referring to the schools following the government's food plate recommendations)
- Healthy relationships with friends
- Feeling good about yourself/self respect
- Self actualization-realizing your own potential/self esteem
- Freedom of actions and expressions



Community Health Improvement Process

- Marathons
- Health class is required
- Interactions with different cultures
- FDA/Clean Air Act [is enforced]
- [Good relationships with] the police

Barriers to Health and Well-Being

Participants discussed obstacles to optimal health and well-being in Montgomery County, emphasizing the challenges detailed below.

(Group One)

- To improve school security (weapons brought to school, violence prevention)
- More community leaders/role models
- Awareness of drug trafficking
- More efforts to help the needy (food drives, clothing, more community clinics)
- Healthier school lunches
- Implementing IB/magnet programs

(Group Two)

- Less Crime→theft, drugs, violence; and more security→more cameras, police personnel
- Health care—[awareness of higher] medical bills
- Food prices-healthy food [is expensive], unhealthy food [is cheap] or create easy access to healthy food
- Bullying—monitor them, [put better] regulations in place, higher consequences, [support] awareness
- School times—[the debate over] start and end times i.e. more time to sleep vs. more time to do homework
- Standardized testing (too much) [creating an awareness among administrators]
- Drug related media [is prevalent] (music, etc...)

(Group Three)

- Stereotypes (racial) [raising awareness and support for those affected]
- School lunch—less bad food
- [Not an] Equal opportunity for all
- [Not enough] counselors
- Drugs
- Trouble in school (reduce crime)
- [There should be] more IB& AP program offered
- Stress and pressure affects students
- Testing is EXCESSIVE! (sic)

(Group Four)

- [There is a need for] more restaurants



Community Health Improvement Process

- Community events cost too much
- [Stresses related to school/life of a student]
 - School work and standardized tests lead to stress and lack of sleep
 - School start times
 - There is pressure on students to be involved—no ‘me’ time to relax and see friends
 - Pressure from teachers and parents to do well and engage in activities
 - Tough grading

Practical Steps to Improve Health and Well-Being

Participants were asked to identify the actions needed to improve the health and well being in their communities. Time was running short, so instead of having the groups identify and prioritize actions, the facilitator reviewed themes from the report out components of each section. The top themes included stressors related to school (i.e. mental and emotional health) and safety. The facilitator then asked the group the actions they would like to see happen to make their community healthier. As five minutes were remaining in the conversation, the students identified having a bigger, strong voice was important to them. They agreed that demanding more accountability from the Student Member of the [School] Board (SMOB) was one way to accomplish that. Additionally, having more than one student representative would also be helpful. More of the action steps were captured in the student’s written remarks (Asterisks that appear after a topic indicate that this topic was repeated several times in the written comments):

- More security in the community/schools to prevent violence and to keep people safe/lower gang involvement*****
- A lot of activities that can improve the community
- Educate people on health
- Help people improve self image
- Less standardized tests/drop out of PARCC as a state****
- More understanding from teachers**
- More support for teens
- Allowance for free time*
- Talk to students specifically about implementing healthier school lunches*
- More say in the hands of the people; there should be a community vote for certain issues; more communication between citizens; have discussions in the school and community meetings to talk about what we want to change in your schools and your environment*****
- More counselors in schools
- More open mindedness
- Cut down on drugs**
- More accessibility
- Food price regulation
- ACTUALLY LISTENING TO SMOB (Student Member of the Board) {sic}
- Students more opportunity



Community Health Improvement Process

Community Conversation Feedback

Participants were provided an opportunity to give written feedback about the meeting. In a short closeout survey, participants were asked, “Is there anything else that you want us to know, including what you like or did not like about this community conversation?” Most of the participants responded to this question and their comments are provided below.

I feel good about my community

I like what ideas we can add in schools and social and our lifestyle

Does our community do what is best for people or business?

The program here was great; the flow of the community and opportunity for input was wonderful. However, the reported interruption by one group was displeasing due to their “leaders” apparent “humor”. However, the idea and execution of the program was wonderful and the staff was kind as well.

This community is good and clean, it is just in need of cleaning

It was a bit disorganized when it came to sharing thoughts

It was very open and fun

Liked that everyone listened

Want it to be more structured and organized

I liked the Chipotle and Starbucks idea. Also how we talked about the strengths, challenges and ways to improve health in our community

It was very insightful and fun

It was helpful to talk about how our community is

Liked the diversity of the place. Very open and opinionated, in a good way

The SMOB (Student Member of the Board of Education) does have a reasonable voice considering they are kids

I thought that there was not a lot of “Step up, step back” tonight.

I loved the opportunity to express my feelings about the community with the same like minded people as me.

I enjoyed the feeling of being amongst teenagers and the facilitator was engaging and maintained focus—good luck in your community endeavors

I loved the people that were in this community conversation

Was entertaining

I thought it was fun



Community Health Improvement Process

Facilitator's Summary

The young people's discussion encompassed several general themes regarding their experiences in their communities. It should be noted that while many aspects of the larger community were discussed, the young people spoke mostly about their experience within their schools, families and amongst their circle of friends. Following are a list of themes that came up (in no particular order):

Safety—The young people spoke of a general sense of safety in their community and within their schools. However, many of the concerns voiced were also around needing more school and/or community police and wanting more to be done about the availability and use of illegal drugs among their peers.

Stress—There was a lot of discussion around the participant's stress levels and their ability to cope with stress as it relates to school work, academics and standardized testing. Many of the participants felt that there is excessive pressure on students to do well at school. Further, youth in the group voiced a correlation between that pressure and feelings of low self esteem, depression and other mental and emotional health deficiencies.

Community events, support and messaging—In general, the young people appreciated that availability of events in the community (fairs, community festivals, after school activities and extracurricular clubs). They also appreciated the transportation system and felt they could get to wherever they needed to go.

Promoting the Youth Voice—Many participants identified the desire to have the youth voice be heard and understood. They recognized that efforts have already been made to support this vision (i.e. having a SMOB), but more representation and opportunities to be heard on issues other than school was suggested. Participants also suggested more accountability for issues that are raised and suggestions that are made by young people.

General health promotion/messaging—Participants also voiced an appreciation that the schools were following the FDA's Healthy Plate guidelines and healthy food choices are generally available. However, the participants spoke about the need for more affordable and a larger variety of healthy food choices both at school and within the community. It was noted that many of the participants felt healthy and/or organic food choices were much more expensive than non-healthy choices and recognized that this creates a barrier to a healthier lifestyle.